



March 3, 2020

Mayor Chopp and Councillors
Norfolk County
50 Colborne Street South
Simcoe, ON N3Y 4H3

Norfolk County Arenas

Dear Mayor Chopp & Councillors:

The Simcoe & District Minor Hockey Association (“SDMHA”) recently held our first Board of Directors meeting since the release of Norfolk County’s 2020 Tax Budget. We hereby wish to express our grave concern with the decisions to close the Simcoe Rec Centre arena and to seek private arena management of additional arenas (and, if no manager is found, to close an additional arena effective September 2020).

These decisions will result in significant operational and programming consequences to the SDMHA and we hereby request your strong consideration of delaying these actions to allow time for further consultation and consideration. We would be pleased to engage Norfolk County to discuss alternative and preferred solutions to the high cost of arena operations, of which we believe there are many.

In the meantime, we wish to share our concerns regarding 1) the closing of the Simcoe Rec Centre arena, and 2) the private arena management Request for Proposals (“RFP”) process.

Simcoe Rec Centre Arena

The SDMHA currently serves our members by utilizing the two Simcoe arenas.

We anticipate that closing the Simcoe Rec Centre will severely limit our ability to host tournaments and we will not be able to hold any of our games for children under 9 years old in Simcoe.

Hockey Canada has mandated that hockey for such ages be played cross-ice. However, this cannot be accommodated at Talbot Gardens because 1) the ice surface is already under-sized



and too small to structure this play per Hockey Canada guidelines, 2) using the temporary boards to divide the ice covers a door on each player's bench due to the bench layout at Talbot Gardens, resulting in one door needing to be used by two teams, which does not work, and 3) there is no storage area that can accommodate the temporary boards at Talbot Gardens.

For these reasons these games are currently earmarked for the Simcoe Rec Centre.

It is the expectations of parents that their children have a place to play hockey in Simcoe. The transfer of all under-9 hockey games to alternative arenas will certainly upset our Simcoe parents and will result in reduced participation rates.

Over and above our normal programming, SDMHA makes significant use of the Simcoe Rec Centre when we host our five local tournaments. As a recent example, the Vic Jackson Memorial Tournament held in January 2020, attracted 30 teams from all over the province for a four day Norfolk County experience. The economic impact to the region is significant. All hotels, restaurants and leisure facilities were fully booked during these events, generating tens of thousands of dollars to local businesses. We coordinate these events with our local business partners who staff up their facilities and welcome the benefits realized by our ability to host events during the typically slow winter season.

In addition to the under-9 hockey game programming and impacts on tournament programming, we understand that the utilization rates of the Simcoe arenas, while not 100%, are fairly strong. We further understand that with the current plans in relocating the Seniors Centre that it is likely possible for them to relocate to the Simcoe Rec Centre and for the arena to also remain in operation. With the Simcoe arenas realizing fairly high utilization rates, we question the necessity of closing one of the Simcoe arenas, thereby displacing a great number of hockey teams/players to alternative arenas.

With our participation in the newly-organized Norfolk Minor Hockey Association we also look forward to growing our player numbers and program offerings. With the closing of the Simcoe Rec Centre arena we question whether Norfolk County will have the appropriate capacity to accommodate and support this growth and success.

Private Arena Management RFP Process

The SDMHA is required to submit our ice time requests to Norfolk County by June for the 2020-2021 hockey season. We understand that the earliest the RFP process will be closed is also June.



We view this timeline as being extremely problematic. It will cause us extreme challenge because we will need to deliver our ice requests without knowing:

- i) Which arenas will be open (in the event a second arena is closed);
- ii) What the ice time fees will be for any privately managed arenas; and
- iii) What service expectations we should have for any privately managed arenas.

Without the clarity of this information it is also impossible for us to finalize our budget for the 2020-2021 season, which is required to establish registration fees for our members. With 2020-2021 tryouts commencing this April we cannot fairly convey to our members the anticipate costs of playing, or even where they will be playing.

We would also hope that in putting out a RFP for private arena management that all conditions of such management are carefully crafted to ensure users' expectations will be satisfied. We trust that it is our shared priority that Norfolk County's image and brand reputation for the state and operation of its facilities is maintained, and also that the SDMHA can host tournaments and other hockey events at any privately managed arenas with confidence. We ask that there be engagement with user groups on such expectations prior to rolling out an RFP.

In summary, we would like to work with Norfolk County to find preferred solutions to the arena cost challenges. Immediately closing the Simcoe Rec Centre arena and launching a RFP process for private arena management of other Norfolk arenas will cause the SDMHA serious operational challenges and surely result in member disappointment. Most unfortunately, we fear all parties will regret these decisions and they will deprive us of the ability to instead work together to discover solutions which will reduce cost and improve our ability to serve our community.

Your re-consideration and engagement is strongly and urgently requested.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Martin Jefferson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Martin Jefferson,
President
Simcoe & District Minor Hockey Association